THE FUTURE IS TODAY: A BURKEAN/MARXIST ANALYSIS OF *MODERN TIMES* & *SOYLENT GREEN*

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ABSTRACT

THESIS: The Future is Today: A Burkean/Marxist Analysis of *Modern Times* & *Soylent Green*

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This thesis examines the 1936 film *Modern Times* and the 1973 film *Soylent Green*. I examine both films from both a Burkean perspective, dissecting the terministic screens present in each film, and a Marxist perspective, analyzing the films' depiction of alienation, class struggle and human commodification. My ultimate argument is that each respective film contains two terministic screens that problematize the cultural narratives of industrialization and technological advancement. *Modern Times* uses screens of dehumanization and the American Dream to depict the plight of working people trapped in menial, low-paying jobs aspiring in vain to something better, whereas *Soylent Green* uses screens of degradation and pollution to highlight how human bodies are devalued, being treated first as disposable and then as consumable products. I conclude my analysis by connecting fictional dystopias, both in these specific films and as a larger genre, to the turmoil extant in the real world.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, human civilization relied solely on the written and spoken word to communicate ideas, observations and stories. Throughout the twentieth century, humanity was given a variety of new mediums for expression, from the first film cameras in the 1900s to television in the 1950s and finally the rise of the Internet in late 1990s. Within a single century, human communication had been revolutionized to a degree rivaled only by the invention of writing in prehistoric times. Visual mediums such as film are a fundamental building block of modern culture, and thus deserve the attention of rhetorical and communication scholars. According to Ott and Mack (2014), the media technologies of contemporary society have become nothing less than omnipresent, acting no longer as "one institution among many" within our culture but as the "very basis of our cultural environment" (p. 13). Media is far more than entertainment, but serves as society's educator, agenda-setter, caretaker and moral compass, shaping nearly all of our perceptions of the world around us (Ott & Mack, 2014). In this chapter, I make the case for expanding traditional, Burkean scholarship further into mass media analysis. In particular, I explain why the films *Modern Times* and *Soylent Green* are excellent examples for such research.

Studying media, especially of this type, is vital in contemporary times. In the twenty-first century, we live in the most media-saturated culture in human history. Visual mediums have become so omnipresent that mediated texts have increasingly become the primary shapers of our political and social worldviews. According to Rose (2017), the

year 2017 marked a "new era of Hollywood wokeness", with films like *Get Out* and *The Post* challenge the conventional wisdom that "political" and "profitable" are mutually exclusive in show business (para. 1). However, this is not the first time Hollywood films have exuded political awareness, and by examining past films of this ilk scholars can better understand the methods and approaches of sociopolitical commentary in the media of today.

This chapter first highlights scholarship that articulates the need for projects like this, and then discusses each of the two films individually. The following section reviews the literature of Kenneth Burke, Karl Marx and the subcategories of film studies, science fiction and utopian/dystopian fiction. The next two sections analyze each film individually, first *Modern Times* and then *Soylent Green*. The final section is the conclusion, which summarizes my findings and restates my overall thesis.

Justification

Since the 1920s, film has had a tremendous impact on Western society. Though cinema is not as commonplace today as other mediums, such as television or social media, it has by far the longest history out of all of them. The vast majority of iconic images within our culture stem from the silver screen, as do many of our most iconic quotations. In addition, cinema has often been described in conjunction with other art forms, with Stam (2000) citing such definitions as "sculpture in motion," "music of light," "painting in movement," and "architecture in movement" (p. 33). This line of thinking is apt, as film requires far more than just a camera. It needs a convergence of writing, music, design and cinematography in order to truly be complete. As a result, film

is an amalgamation of our modern media, which in turn means it can be the most reflective of modern society, especially in a rhetorical sense.

In spite of this, film studies often are not included in rhetorical scholarship, though this exclusion is far from universal. Blakesly (2003) collected a number of perspectives used by rhetorical critics for the study of film. The first, "film as language," focuses on the semiotic structure of film and analyzes the effect of said structure on the perceptions on a film's audience (Blakesly, 2003, p. 4). The second, "film as ideology," analyzes a film's celebration or condemnation of the prevailing ideology of the times, and does so from both a content and production standpoint (Blakesly, 2003, p. 5). The third, "film interpretation," is built on sense-making, with the critic taking into account the film's director, content and audience equally to decipher the film as a rhetorical situation (Blakesly, 2003, p. 6). The fourth and final perspective is "film identification," attempts to decipher the "ideological, psychological, or social purposes" present within a film's stylistic approaches (Blakesly, 2003, p. 7). All four of these perspectives have broad possibilities for application, which is in and of itself and indicator for the rhetorical and scholarly richness of film and media.

Among the most prominent scholars of film were members of the Frankfurt School. Founded by exiles from Nazi Germany in the 1930s, the Frankfurt School developed an analytical lens known as critical theory: a Marxist viewpoint that was intended to allow for broad critique of capitalist culture (Bronner, 2011). According to Stam (2000), French scholar Georges Duhamel regarded cinema as the "slaughterhouse of culture," a pleasurable anesthetic for the masses that enabled conformism rather than artistic or political expression (p. 64). In a direct response to Duhamel, critic Walter

Benjamin argued that cinema offered a chance to not only critique capitalism but could also set the stage for its dissolution, as the medium's reliance on mass production gave it a near universal reach (Stam, 2000). Though strongly divided between optimistic and pessimistic viewpoints, the scholars of the Frankfurt School undeniably laid the groundwork for modern scholars viewing mass media as having a major effect on society.

More recently, Brummett (1984) argued that popular media such as film and television could serve as "equipment for living," a Burkean concept that argue that the media people consume helps to contextualize and make sense of their experiences (p. 162). Burke largely confined the application of this term to literature and other print media, but Brummett (1984) expanded this to apply to all media forms by substituting the word "literature" for "discourse" (p. 162). By doing this, Brummett (1984) kept the essence of Burke's ideas intact, while still allowing them a significantly wider sphere of application. Expansion and adaptation of ideas is the key to a scholar's continued influence in the modern era, and applying Burke to contemporary media is a perfect example of this. Brummett (2013) argued that films, popular or otherwise, are not simple entertainment, and are often a means through which to impart values on their audience. Persuasion is frequently seen as a function of rhetoric, and Burke's writings focused on the shaping of the human mind through media, making rhetorical studies and visual media a perfect match.

Within the medium of film, science fiction is a genre that provides astoundingly rich ground for analysis. One of the most in-depth analyses of this genre came in the form of Darko Suvin's (1979) *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, in which he outlined the uniqueness and idiosyncrasies of the science fiction genre. Specifically, Suvin (1979)

claimed that science fiction narratives fall into one of two categories, *estrangement* or *cognition* (p. 3). The former acts as a form of escapism, creating a reality vastly different than our own that allows us to experience a new set of norms, be they cultural, religious, political or otherwise (Suvin, 1979). The latter, by contrast, is meant as a critique of present day reality, questioning the norms of the day and challenging the reader or viewer to truly contemplate either their own values or those of the larger culture (Suvin, 1979). In defining these two categories, Suvin (1979) established science fiction as a genre deeply rooted in the socio-cultural factors, namely what a particular culture, fact or fiction, truly considers valuable. As a result, science fiction as a genre, both in film and literature, is ripe for Burkean analysis.

Similarly, Mazierska and Suppia (2016) conducted an extensive analysis of science fiction films through the lens of Marxism. In their book, the authors purported that cinema in general is oriented towards the future, as it is recorded for the explicit purpose of viewing at a later date (Mazierska & Suppia, 2016). As for science fiction cinema in particular, the authors stated that it carries the innate ability to create worlds that do not exist, visions which are inextricably tied to the societal and technological circumstances surrounding their production (Mazierska & Suppia, 2016). In short, science fiction cinema attempts to predict the future by drawing from the culture of its creators, which can manifest itself as either a celebration or a condemnation of the norms of said culture. To properly and prophetically look toward the future, one must first take into account the present and the past.

Numerous science fiction scholars have echoed this mode of thinking over the years. Baxter (1970) called science fiction the “poetry of the atomic age,” that serves as

"shorthand" for the societal pressures and anxieties of the times (p. 13). Sobchack (1987) wrote about a major shift in science fiction in the years following the Second World War, more specifically in the aftermath of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. According to Sobchack (1987), prewar science fiction was typically optimistic, often crafting Utopian visions of the future driven by the uninhibited progress of science. However, after 1945, science fiction became dominated by ideas of dystopian nightmares, where unrestrained technology proves to be humanity's undoing instead of its savior (Sobchack, 1987). Hogan (2006) summed up the rhetorical role of science fiction very succinctly, stating that it "illuminates our public faces and our secret lives" (p. 1). All of these scholars point to the same conclusion: science fiction is a reflection of human society, our greatest hopes and our greatest fears.

This project extrapolates on the social consciousness element of science fiction by examining and contrasting two films, Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) and Richard Fleischer's *Soylent Green* (1973). Both fall into the category of dystopia, but the two approach this concept from completely opposite directions. *Modern Times* is a (mostly) silent slapstick comedy, and is widely regarded as one of Chaplin's comedic masterpieces (Gehring, 2007). By contrast, *Soylent Green* is an especially dark and somber film, equal parts murder mystery, action thriller and environmentalist polemic of contemporary society. Despite this stark contrast, the two films tackle similar themes, namely the promises and failures of industrialization carry for both individuals and human civilization as a whole.

To be more specific, I answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What terministic screens can be identified in the dystopian worlds of Modern Times and Soylent Green?

RQ2: In what ways is a Marxist ideology reflected in each film?

Released in 1936, *Modern Times* was the product of Chaplin's sixteen-month world tour in the year 1931, which gave Chaplin a broad insight into the global effects of the Great Depression (Vance, 2003). During this escapade, Chaplin met with many world leaders and thinkers, including Winston Churchill, Albert Einstein and Mohandas Gandhi (Vance, 2003). This experience prompted Chaplin to develop a more socially conscious mindset, but the film's exact inception came when Chaplin saw a "mass of people coming out of a factory," and solemnly concluded, "the theme…of modern times is mass production" (Gehring, 2007, p. 140). The final product of this moment of clarity was *Modern Times*, a comedic but unambiguously critical depiction on the industrial society America had become by the 1930s.

Upon its release, the film was both praised and derided for its sociopolitical overtones. The film was considerably popular in leftist circles, with Communist publication the *New Masses* celebrating it as the first mainstream American film "daring" enough to challenge industrial capitalism and its many injustices (Gehring, 2007, p. 142). On the international level, the film was banned in both Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, partly due to Chaplin's alleged Jewish heritage, but primarily because the film was accused of promoting Communist ideals, with the film being labeled as "Soviet propaganda" (Gehring, 2007, p. 149). Chaplin intended this film to ruffle the political feathers of the day, and there is no denying that he received the reaction he was looking

for in that regard. Intent is a key component of a rhetorical text, visual or otherwise, and the keen eye of a rhetorical critic is the perfect instrument to uncover that intent.

Soylent Green[1] was made with a similar purpose in mind, though it advanced a somewhat different message and was directed at a different era. The 1970s were a decade marked by significant upheaval and disillusionment, particularly in the United States following events such as the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. One of the major shifts in this uneasy time was the growing prominence of environmentalism in American society, a trend that was reflected in the science fiction films of the decade. A new subgenre of science fiction cinema was created, the "eco-disaster" film, which predicted and/or dramatized the potentially devastating effects of pollution on human society, either in the present day or in the future (Knipfel, 2017).

Soylent Green is among the most well known of this eco-disaster subgenre today. Following its release in 1973, the film won both the Nebula Award for Best Dramatic Presentation and the Saturn Award for Best Science Fiction Film. In 2005, the American Film Institute published a list of the top one hundred movie quotes, with the iconic "Soylent Green is people!" ranking at number seventy-seven. According to director Richard Fleischer, his intent was to emphasize the film's social commentary, rather than the plot and characters through a technique known as "background becoming foreground" (Knipfel, 2017). This technique privileges a film's subtle elements, such as production design, as the primary means of conveying a film's thematic elements. Theme, aesthetics and symbolism are key factors in delivering a socially or politically charged message, and the filmmaking techniques present in both of these films make

[1] In 2014, the dietary supplement "Soylent", named after the 1973 film, was released for public consumption (Love, 2014).

their messages both discernable and fascinating to the academic eye. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to past literature on both my theoretical framework and my subject matter.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the scholarly literature that I drew upon in creating and performing this analysis. First, I discuss the work of rhetorical scholar Kenneth Burke, including his theoretical concept known as terministic screens, which I argue can be broadened to account for changing times. Second, I discuss the Marxist concepts of alienation and class struggle, and how both concepts play into my film analysis. Third, I recount previous research into the science fiction genre, examining how said genre is often used as a vehicle for social commentary, both in its literary and cinematic forms. Fourth, I sift through research on the parallel genres of utopia and dystopia, particularly research that illuminates how an imagined paradise or perdition is often linked to reality. My overall argument in collecting this literature is as follows: Film is often charged with deeper thematic and rhetorical meanings, and Burke's terministic screens are a fitting way of analyzing those meanings.

Kenneth Burke

Kenneth Burke (1897-1993) is often regarded as one of the most prominent scholars of the twentieth century. Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Burke briefly attended both Ohio State University and Columbia University, and although he never received a college degree, he went on to make a name for himself as a literary critic and rhetorical scholar (n.d., para. 2). Early in his career, Burke worked as a poet, novelist, translator, music critic, occasional lecturer at the University of Chicago, and finally earned a full professorship at Vermont's Bennington College from 1943 to 1961 (n.d., para. 2). Burke's biggest influence on the field of communication came about in the

1960s, when he published his writings on literature, which he considered a form of "symbolic action", where in language and human agency coalesce to provide an "arousing and fulfillment of desires" in both readers and authors (Lyons, 1993, para. 3). In addition, Burke wrote about the need to examine not just the "intrinsic" elements of literature (i.e. style, syntax, et cetera), but also the larger context of the work, namely its audience, biographical information on the author, and its social, historical and political background (n.d., para. 3). Within these theories, Burke (1966) created a concept known as "terministic screens", which are the primary framework of my thesis (p. 44).

In many of these writings, Kenneth Burke examined the power and infinite complexity of language. Burke (1966) wrote of the somewhat confusing duality of language, saying it is both the means by which "each person is different from anyone else, a unique combination of experiences and judgments," and that it is universal, calling human beings "a kind of animal that approaches everything through modes of thought developed by the use of symbol systems" (p. 28). According to Burke (1966), the many organizations developed to represent the interests of various peoples, namely those of a democratic or parliamentary purpose, are instrumental to our need as a species to communicate, and the existence of a menagerie of organizations designed specifically for "methodic discussion" of human problems reflect the omnipresent nature of the need for communication (p. 29).

Through his insistence on language's universal nature, Burke opened the door for scholars of communication and rhetoric to explore beyond the confines of public address. Burke (1966) characterized a terministic screen, in a simplified paraphrasing, as the definitions and symbols that human beings, both as individuals and as collective cultures,

place on items and concepts in the larger world that surrounds us (p. 44). However, his definition of this concept goes far deeper than a simple linguistic or cross-cultural lexicon of words and terms. Instead, Burke (1966) crafted his idea with a much, much broader scope in mind, stating that the terministic screens we choose not only "reflect reality" but also "deflect reality" (p. 45). Far more than simple descriptors and monikers, terministic screens serve as interpreters.

In other words, assigning a terministic screen to a certain object or action is not a simple description of what an individual senses, but a matter of emphasizing the parts of reality that we like and deemphasize that which we do not. For example, in *Language as Symbolic Action* (1966), Burke described example of two scholars, one an evolutionary biologist and the other a theologian, each of whom was compiling and editing a history textbook. The former, in discussing the development of humanity, deliberately chooses terms like "Darwinian," "natural selection" and "genetics," which paint an appropriately scientific, and nonreligious, picture for the scientific text being constructed. By contrast, the theologian incorporates terms such as 'God," "Creation" and "holy," all religious terms that reflect the religious vision that the author is attempting to generate in the reader (p. 46). Both authors, in spite of extremely different mindsets, use the exact same method in order to achieve their goal of articulating their worldview in print form.

It is those last three words that show the opportunities for further research on Burke's original concept of terministic screens. For all his claims of the universality and omnipresence of the screens, the examples he provided for them are largely textual or literary in nature. Despite having written his text on terministic screens more than halfway through the twentieth century, little to no attention is paid to how visual

mediums like film and television have been influenced in relation to terministic screens. Burke (1966) selects a plethora of exemplar texts for his book, from the *Divine Comedy* to *Death of a Salesman* to *Don Quixote*, but none of them are of a visual nature and the words "film" and "television" do not appear in the index at all.

If anything, Burke is himself deflecting the reality of a media-driven civilization, especially in regards to the works of Marshall McLuhan. Burke (1966) dedicated a significant portion of the sixth chapter of *Language as Symbolic Action* to McLuhan's concept of "medium as message," particularly McLuhan's emphasis on the technological means of delivering a message, which McLuhan calls far more important than "content analysis" (p. 413). According to McLuhan (1964), technology inherently affects human society through "fragmentation," meaning it results in either a division of people into new organization patterns or simply rearranges existing ones (p. 8). McLuhan (1964) insisted that technology itself is the cause of this social impact, with the "message" being delivered by said technology being irrelevant (p. 8). Going a step further, McLuhan (1964) proclaimed that a cultural obsession with the "content" of a message collectively blinds scholars as to the importance of the medium being utilized (p. 9). By placing focus entirely on the medium that is used, with no regard to what is actually said through the medium, Burke (1966) claimed that McLuhan acknowledges the diversity of media technology but utterly ignores the corresponding diversity that exists among media content, a criticism that is admittedly valid.

However, it is in that very criticism that Burke ironically exposed his own deflections of diversity, not with regard to content but to mediums. By focusing largely on works of literature and theater, Burke ignores the influences of non-textual mediums

on society, which has been nothing short of gargantuan. According to McLuhan (1962), the effects of a new form of media technology, from the earliest forms of writing to color television, are most prevalent in the generation to which they are first introduced, for it is the first time that humanity's collective senses are exposed to a new auditory or visual sensation (p. 22-23). However, McLuhan (1962) stated that the most lasting and profound effects only come to light as time passes and the world has time to assimilate the new technology into everyday life. This is a fact that Burke, as McLuhan's contemporary, surprisingly did not take into account. I am not suggesting that Burke was an inadequate scholar, nor do I mean to insinuate he deliberately ignored McLuhan's work. I am simply pointing out a chance for modern scholars to expand on Burke's writings and to do so in a way that incorporates McLuhan's commitment to new technology.

To clarify, I am not advocating that scholars should discount Burke's writings and theories altogether, nor am I implying that they are faulty simply because he does not have a broad enough scope. Instead, I propose an idea similar to Condit (1992), who made observations and proposals about Burke's writing and creating a "Post-Burke" discourse (p. 349). Like Condit (1992), I am suggesting that we modify and adapt Burke's writings into a more contemporary fashion. The purpose is not to selectively read his research according to personal preferences, but to identify the faults and to move past them while still keeping the essence of his work intact. In her writings, Condit (1992) examined the casually sexist, ethnocentric and classist underpinnings of Burke's work, creating a "post-Burkean definition" for each construct that allowed for a more flexible worldview (p. 352). In this project, I argue a way in which Burke's writings on literature

can be adapted and modified to the realm of visual mediums, specifically film and the science fiction genre in particular.

In addition, I borrow two of the five elements of Burke's (1966) "Definition of Man" (p. 16). According to Burke (1966), man is defined as: 1) the "symbol-using animal," 2) "inventor of the negative," 3) "separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making," 4) "goaded by the spirit of hierarchy," and 5) "rotten with perfection" (p. 16). I draw from the third and fifth concepts in this definition, examining how technology separates people from both nature and their own happiness, and how humanity's relentless pursuit of utopian ideals invariably has dystopian results. In the next section, I argue for a similar adaptation of two Marxist concepts.

Marxism

The main ideas I am borrowing from Marx are the concepts of alienation and class struggle. According to Singer (1980), these two concepts stem from Marx's interpretation of history (also known as historical materialism), which cites human activity, rather than philosophical thought, as the driving force of historical progress. Marx defines "alienation" as when humans are cut off from the products of their labor, and thus are robbed of "control of…production and the mode of their mutual relationships" (as cited in Singer, 1980, p. 46). According to Singer (1980), Marx saw production as the determining factor for political, social and spiritual circumstances in human civilization, resulting in an all-encompassing system known as the superstructure. Though Marx largely applied these concepts to the literal production of goods and services, scholars like myself examine how message production recreates and reinforces capitalist structures, a field of study frequently referred to as neo-Marxism.

Marx and Engels (1888) claimed that all of human history consists of struggle between classes, with the modern industrial era having firmly crystallized into the camps of the proletariat, or working classes, and the bourgeoisie, or ruling classes. In addition, Marx and Engels further divided society into two major components (Harnecker, 1976). First, the "infrastructure" or "base," referring to the economic structure of society, and second, the "superstructure," meaning the "juridicio-political" and "ideological structure" of society (Harnecker, 1976, p. 32). In defining these two structures, Harnecker (1976) argued, Marx and Engels divided the world into two "forms of social consciousness," with the "infrastructure" society being operated by the working class while the upper class maintains domination via systems of law, government and religion (p. 32). This inherent division of civilization based on class is a key element of both films, and is discussed in great detail later in this project in terms of its rhetorical significance.

For my units of analysis, I utilize Althusser's (1971) concept of ideological state apparatuses (ISAs). According to Althusser (1971), an ISA is an extension of a state apparatus (SA), which consist of official administrative organizations such as the government and the military. Downing (2013) defined ISAs as imploring people to "fulfill culturally-scripted roles" through a feedback loop of cause and effect (p. 5). Althusser called this loop the "ideology of ideology," where the public is propagandized into believing in their agency in accepting a given ideology and ignoring the sociological influence of ISAs on their thought processes (as cited in Downing, 2013, p. 5). Althusser (1971) specifically listed eight existing ISAs: "religious," "educational," "family," "legal," "political," "trade-union," "communications," and "cultural," all organizations that do not necessarily have legitimate authority but nonetheless hold considerable

influence over (para. 38). A number of these ISAs are present in both films, and each is discussed as this thesis progresses.

Science Fiction Studies

Another key body of literature I examine is science fiction, because that genre is often studied for its social reflections and rhetoric. One such critic is Barry Brummett (1984), who used Burke's concept of "literature as equipment for living" to examine the presence of social issues and anxieties in fictional discourses, and stated that "nothing" in Burke's theories prevented it from being applied to mass media, including science fiction (p. 161-162). In this essay, Brummett (1984) analyzed the 1955 novel *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and both its 1955 and 1978 film adaptations. Utilizing Burke's "representative anecdote" as his critical approach, Brummett (1984) described the social anxieties of both 1950s and 1970s America, namely Cold War paranoia and the mindless conformity of consumer culture, and then analyzes the depiction of these thematic elements in the three iterations of the *Body Snatchers* story (p. 162). Brummett (1984) referred to this Burkean comparative analysis of discursive elements across mediums as "Xeroxing," and while Brummett (1984) did not explicitly reference terministic screens, it nonetheless provides an example off of which I build my own research (p. 166).

As a genre, and thus as a field of study, science fiction is as broad as it is problematic to distinguish. According to Freedman (2000), there is no "definitional consensus" in regards to science fiction, and media scholars have shown little interest in achieving one over the years (p. 13). Freedman (2000) insisted that the closest scholars have come to such a consensus is a "pulp-centered definition," referring to the over-the-top and melodramatic science fiction stories of the early twentieth century, a definition

the author described as far too narrow (p. 15). In its place, Freedman (2000) stated that science fiction is dependent on "operation of cognition," referring to the text's ability to describe imaginary worlds in a rational manner and allow the reader to notice similarities and difference from the real world (p. 17). Similarly, Kuhn (1990) described science fiction as a genre that is "hard to define" but "readily recognizable in practice," and that science fiction cinema in particular used "codes of visibility" to generate fantastical sights that are plausible in the viewers' minds (p. 1, p. 7). Science fiction, like all fiction, sprouts from the human imagination, a mechanism that often draws from the world for inspiration.

In the realm of science fiction studies, many critics have analyzed film in relation to the reflection and/or deflection of societal values. For example, Mazierska and Suppia, (2016) studied three films by Polish director Marek Piestrak; *The Test of Pilot Pirx* (1979), *Curse of Snakes Valley* (1987), and *Tear of the Prince of Darkness* (1992). Each of these features was a coproduction with the Estonian film studio Tallinfilm, and were chosen by the authors for their reflections of trends in both Soviet and post-Soviet cinema (Mazierska and Suppia, 2016). The first film, *Pirx* for short, was made in a time when Poland opened its economy up to Western influences, resulting in a sort of "consumer communism," while Estonia faced increased intrusion by Soviet authorities (Mazierska and Suppia, 2016, para. 5). The second, *Snakes Valley*, was released in the twilight years of the USSR, a time when nationalism was high in Eastern bloc countries as a result of escalating Soviet ineptitude at providing its people with even the most basic consumer goods (Mazierska and Suppia, 2016). The third, *Prince of Darkness*, was released within two years of the Soviet Union's collapse, a time when the "euphoria over national

emancipation" began to fade as the harsh realities of transitioning to capitalism took shape (Mazierska and Suppia, 2016, para. 7). The authors treat each film as something of an ideological time capsule, reflecting the decade in which it was produced.

For example, in *Pirx* (1979), Mazierska and Suppia (2016) claimed that both the capitalist West and Soviet communism are given sub-textual critiques. According to the authors, capitalism is represented in a wholly negative light, with an oppressive and amoral corporation run by an irredeemably greedy leader serving as the primary antagonist (Mazierska and Suppia, 2016). However, this leader bears a striking resemblance to Joseph Stalin, resulting in a subtle vilification of the man who the Soviets revered as both a founding father and savior of their nation (Mazierska and Suppia, 2016). In addition, the villain is reliant on robotic henchmen referred to as "the faceless," whose lack of identity the authors interpreted as a satire of the USSR's attempts to minimize ethnic and national differences within its borders and create a more uniform culture, known as the "Great Soviet Family" (Mazierska and Suppia, 2016, para. 10). The authors refer to this political even-handedness as a mix of an "official ideology," meaning the Communist rhetoric enforced by the Soviet authorities, and a "spontaneous" or "counter-ideology," which in this particular case is a skewering of Communist totalitarianism and hypocrisy (Mazierska and Suppia, 2016, para. 10). Even in a society that strongly inhibited freedom of expression, a science fiction film proves to be a powerful and nuanced reflection of societal flaws and anxieties.

Similar reflections are present in *Snakes Valley* (1987). The primary antagonist of the film is an unnamed archaeological organization based in Paris, which is shown to be blatantly authoritarian in its practices and imperialist in its goals (Mazierska and Suppia,

2016). Released in the last years of the Soviet regime, *Snakes Valley* (1987) was created in what the authors described as a time of loosening censorship, a trend that manifested itself through increased cinematic criticism of the Moscow government (Mazierska and Suppia, 2016). However, Communism was still very much the dominant authority in Eastern Europe, and thus anti-communist sentiments had to be hidden by "capitalist analogies," such as the Parisian institution in *Snakes Valley* (Mazierska and Suppia, 2016, para. 11). Again, the social unrest brewing behind the crumbling Iron Curtain is brought to life via science fiction cinema.

In the case of *Prince of Darkness* (1992), the changes in Eastern Europe are reflected less in terms of thematic elements but strictly in terms of visual content. According to Mazierska and Suppia (2016), the film contains a great deal of female nudity, which is presented in a manner that is far more exploitative than dramatically potent. The authors claimed that this sexualization is reflective of two trends in post-Soviet Europe. The first is a simple "overenthusiasm," as the USSR's dissolution meant that strict censorship was a thing of the past, and filmmakers were excited to show what had been forbidden for decades (Mazierska and Suppia, 2016, para. 16). The second trend carries a far more pessimistic vibe, reflecting the decline of women's rights and reinstituting of patriarchal values in the newly capitalist Eastern nations (Mazierska and Suppia, 2016). According to the authors, *Prince of Darkness* (1992) shows that a science fiction film can reflect social and cultural phenomena even unintentionally, symbolizing both the end of the Soviet censor and the dawn of female objectification in media (Mazierska and Suppia, 2016).

Western science fiction is often just as reflective of social trends, even in the case of popular science fiction film franchises. A prominent example of this is the *Planet of the Apes* saga, which critic Frederick S. Clarke referred to as having "the promise of being the first epic of filmed science fiction" (as cited in Greene, 1996, p. 1). According to Greene (1996), the franchise's central conflict between human beings and sentient primates is symbolic of long-standing racial tensions in American history. More specifically, Greene (1996) states that the films reflect the chronic White American fear of a "racial apocalypse," meaning a catastrophic upheaval in society that would lead to an inversion of established White racial hegemony (p. 24-25). The original *Apes* films were released between 1968 and 1973, a time in which this fear was exacerbated by both the deteriorating US war effort in Vietnam and the increasingly violent struggle for Black liberation on American soil (Greene, 1996). This unrest is reflected greatly by the films, each of which depict a society built upon a strict racial hierarchy, one which is challenged by both the oppressed group and moderating influences of the privileged group, with either position being held by either humans or apes depending on the film (Greene, 1996).

The fourth film, *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* (1972), is by far the most direct in terms of its allegorical themes. Set in the near future, the film depicts a society in which humans use apes as a source of slave labor, forcing them to do menial tasks and keeping them in line through the use of cruel Pavlovian conditioning and strict segregation of public spaces. This systemic abuse ultimately leads to the apes violently rising up against their human oppressors, who attempt and fail to suppress the simian rebellion through a militarized police force armed with riot gear. According to Greene

(1996), the film's depiction of "urban violence" was directly inspired by the race riots of 1960s America, namely the violent Watts riots that occurred in 1965 (p. 80). Through a fantastical veil, in this case one of talking apes and a futuristic setting, a science fiction film can reflect society's darkest components and its greatest fears, all in the hope of both appealing to an audience and making said audience reevaluate what they are told to value.

Utopia/Dystopia

Within the larger science fiction genre, the twin subgenres of utopia and dystopia have always held great prominence. According to Greenberg, Olander, and Rabkin (1983), the word "utopia" literally translates to "no place," while "dystopia" translates to "bad place," and examples of both date back as far as Plato's *Republic* (p. 1). These authors detailed a number of common tropes evident in the two opposing subgenres, including an attitude of atavism, or a return to an earlier state (Greenberg et al., 1983). In essence, the atavism described by the authors referred to a return to innocence, either a literal return to a naturalistic, Eden-like society or a metaphorical return to a child-like mindset (Greenberg et al., 1983). According to the authors, the latter of these two manifests itself in both utopian and dystopia literature, namely in the repression of sexuality and knowledge, which serves to reduce personal attachments and ambitions in the name of maintaining the dominant social structure (Greenberg et al., 1983). Though the details of utopian/dystopian plots and settings vary greatly, those basic elements of personal and societal deprivation or repression are constants. To properly understand these tropes, I pull from scholarly work that draws on both literary and cinematic utopias and dystopias.

Dickerson (2005) established a more comprehensive list of elements for both utopias and dystopias. According to Dickerson (2005), a "utopia" is not necessarily a perfect place, but rather a nonexistent place that is considerably better than that occupied by the audience (p. 2). Similarly, Dickerson (2005) referred to "dystopia" not simply as a "bad place," but instead a reality where utopian ideals for improving society have backfired tremendously (p. 2). According to the author, a utopia is built on several basic components: offering solutions to present day problems, world peace, cultural diversity, technology eliminating strife and providing a voice to all, and a token amount of resistance or dissent (Dickerson, 2005, p. 4-9). Dickerson (2005) asserts the elements of dystopia are in direct opposition to their utopian counterparts: exaggeration of present day injustices, resulting from current attempts at social improvement, social division or stratification, dehumanization by way of technology, and again a token amount of dissent (p. 9-14). These basic, interrelated elements appear in the vast majority of utopian and dystopian narratives, particularly those within the larger science fiction genre such as *Modern Times* and *Soylent Green*.

Among the menagerie of dystopian narratives in world literature, by far the two most prominent are Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). According to Greenberg, Olander, and Rabkin (1983), Huxley originally intended the novel as a parody of the utopian literature of the early twentieth century, specifically the HG Wells novel *Men Like Gods* (1923). According to the authors, Huxley quickly expanded the book into a broader satire of the emerging consumer culture of the 1920s, as brought on by Henry Ford's development of mass production, standardization and mass consumption, colloquially known as Fordism

(Greenberg et al., 1983). In his novel, Huxley created a world where these principles are applied to human beings, where people are mass-produced on embryonic assembly lines and psychologically conditioned to be blissfully subservient to society, with free access to sex and mind-altering drugs to remove any remaining unhappiness (Greenberg et al., 1983). According to Baker (1990), Huxley intended this dystopia as criticism of both the eugenics movement and consumerism as a whole, painting a future where people are no longer citizens, but at best consumers and at worst "commodities" (p. 10). Huxley wrote his book at the dawn of modern capitalism, and by predicting what could become of consumer culture centuries in the future, he showed us the ugliness that lies beneath the benign-sounding ideals of production and consumption.

Similarly, Orwell drew inspiration for the dystopia in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from the totalitarian regimes of the 1930s and 1940s, namely Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The book is set in the titular year, in a totalitarian state called Oceania, where an endless stream of propaganda through mass media and constant surveillance of the population by the mysterious Big Brother keeps the masses in line. According to Messerer (1984), Orwell was heavily inspired by the practices of the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin, namely in the cult of personality Stalin had built for himself by 1949. In the book, the people of Oceania must stop each day for the "Two Minutes Hate". This entails chanting death to both their foreign and internal enemiesm and concludes with the expression of undying love for their glorious leader. According to Messerer (1984), this ritual is lifted directly from the Stalinist era, when the Soviet people were expected to stop their daily routines to hear Stalin's speeches and announcements.

In addition, Messerer (1984) argues that the Orwellian concepts of Newspeak and doublethink are lifted from the USSR. In the book, Newspeak is an artificial language created for the sole purpose of condensing the English language to shut down political dissent, while doublethink is the ability to hold two conflicting ideas as equally true, thus overriding rational thought with official propaganda. According to Messerer (1984), the Soviet editions of Russian-language dictionaries did not contain the word "privacy" as meaning "solitude," but instead as meaning "loneliness" or "secrecy" (p. 132). Messerer (1984) reinforces this claim with an anecdote of his home being invaded by Soviet authorities, and him not being able to verbally defend himself, as he had no word to express exactly what rights the officers were violating. Drawing from an incredible irony, Messerer (1984) compares 1980s Soviet propaganda to doublethink, as such materials often referenced or quoted Orwell's book to exaggerate harsh conditions in the capitalist West, despite an official ban on Orwell's writings within the USSR's borders. Burkean terministic screens are meant as reflections of reality to promote a certain worldview, and the anti-totalitarian views of Orwell and Huxley are conveyed excellently through their use of real-world inspiration.

A key element of dystopian fiction is its capacity for foresight, an ability that has given Huxley and Orwell's writings a longevity that has lasted to the present day. According to Hitchens (2004), Huxley was repulsed by "mass culture and popular entertainment," and also claimed that if he were alive today he would find the modern world eerily similar to his nightmarish future world (p. vii). Neil Postman (1985) claimed that *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* continue to fascinate scholars and readers as the dystopias depicted in both are polar opposites, and yet are equally poignant

and unnerving. According to Postman (1985), an Orwellian dystopia is a "prison," where the power structure controls the populace through deprivation; a descriptor he claimed fit repressive governments such as those of China and the Soviet Union (p. 18). By contrast, Postman (1985) referred to a Huxleyan dystopia as a "burlesque," where order is maintained by flooding the population's lives with meaningless distractions, which he likened to the media-driven consumer culture of the United States, comparing television to the pacifying hallucinogen used as a societal opiate in Huxley's book.

Such comparisons have also been made between our society and Orwell's writings. According to Stone (2009), Amazon received a heap of controversy when, in response to copyright mishaps, deleted *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* from both its website and from their customers' Kindle devices. Though this decision was quickly reversed, many compared this action to the "memory hole," an disposal chute in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* used to destroy any documents that are no longer politically expedient (Stone, 2009, para. 2). According to England (2017), sales of Orwell's books skyrocketed just days after presidential adviser Kellyane Conway coined the phrase "alternative facts" in her defense of the inaccuracies disseminated by the Trump administration, a spike very similar to the one that occurred following the Snowden leaks in 2013 (para. 2). Though both dystopias are fictional, the terms and concepts put to print by their authors obviously strike a chord with both scholars and the general public as a whole, and the same is easily applied to film.

It is the continuous resonance that motivated me to research this topic through a Burkean lens. Terministic screens are a reflection of the author's personal viewpoint, but also of the much larger cultural context of the time and place in which they were created.

Film is a medium that is inherently more literal than text, due to its dependence on visual storytelling over the written word. In addition, film is more dependent on technological shifts, which simultaneously create significant changes in society as a whole. Thus, comparing films from different eras offers a glimpse into changing social opinions on various topics. In the case of *Modern Times* and *Soylent Green*, the topic is dystopia, the depiction of which varies considerably between the two films. This difference results from an alteration of the terministic screens used in constructing the respective dystopias, which in turn result from major social changes between the 1930s and the 1970s, as well as difference in selection of terministic screens by the directors and screenwriters. This thesis project analyzes the specifics of this selection of screens, so as to prove that Burke is applicable in areas of study beyond literature.

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODS & PROCEDURES

In this thesis project, I analyze the two above films through both a Burkean and a Marxist lens. To accomplish the former, I study both the visual and non-visual storytelling techniques used in both films by way of Burke's terministic screens. To accomplish the latter, I analyze the ways in which both films utilize the Marxist concepts of alienation and the superstructure built upon modes and relations of production. To clarify my methods, I watched each film twice, taking detailed notes on each film's visual storytelling elements to decipher their respective rhetorical languages. In the following sections, I discuss the Burkean concept of terministic screens and the Marxist concepts of alienation and class struggle, which work in conjunction to form the rhetorical messages I analyze in this project.

Kenneth Burke

My primary influence from Burke is, as stated previously, terministic screens. In his writings, Burke (1966) described a terministic screen as both a "reflection" and a "deflection" of reality, each used to generate "observations" that interpret the world based on the "particular terminology" used to make said "observations" (p. 45-46). For example, a theologian would write a history book using terms like "God," "Creation," and "Fall of Man" to reflect his religious worldview, whereas a paleontologist would use terms like "dinosaur," "evolution," and "hominid" to reflect a secular, scientific worldview. In summary, Burke (1966) claims that nothing is truly "objectively there" as a terministic screen of one type or another is required to observe virtually everything (p.

49). My goal in using Burke to understand visual mediums is to demonstrate the universality of the terministic screens concept.

Other scholars have applied Burke's ideas and theories to modern mass media over the years. Asenas and Johnson (2001) studied Steven Spielberg's war epic *Saving Private Ryan* using a Burkean framework, treating the film's depiction of war as a terministic screen. Specifically, the authors examined how the film both embraced and subverted the "American mythology of war," which is defined by scenes of heroes balancing morality and ferocity, the use of powerful but controllable weapons, unsympathetic antagonists and the explicit purpose of defending American interests and security (Asenas & Johnson, 2001, p. 629). According to the authors, the film discursively supports the traditional myth by way of dialogue that justified the Second World War and glorified the sacrifices of soldiers, while simultaneously subverting the myth by showing scenes of constant death and carnage (Arsenas & Johnson, 2001). The authors concluded by saying that the traditional myth is ultimately privileged over the subversive myth given its explicitness (Arsenas & Johnson, 2001).

Chow-White (2007) found terministic screens within news media, specifically Canadian coverage of a ship full of Chinese migrants that arrived in British Columbia in 1999. In the study, Chow-White (2007) highlighted three different terministic screens utilized by various major Canadian news outlets: scapegoating, criminalization and denial of racism. The first screen applied to minimizing racist reactions to the migrants to Far Right and white supremacist organizations and reluctance to actually use the word "racism" out loud, which the author claimed was part of a larger chilling effect on discussing racism openly (Chow-White, 2007). The second screen applied to a

presumption of criminal wrongdoing on the part of the migrants, namely by referring to them as "illegals" in spite of their qualifying for legal refugee status, which Chow-White (2007) connected to a century-long history of Chinese Canadians being associated with criminality by the White majority. The final screen referred to an assertion by certain news outlets that resistance to the migrants was fueled not by racism but by a perception of Asians as representing a culture that was incompatible with Canadian values and society (Chow-White, 2007).

On a more historical note, German (2009) examined the 1943 film *The Autobiography of a Jeep*, an American war propaganda short dramatizing the construction of a personified Jeep meant to encourage the purchasing of the vehicles to support the war effort. Within this nine-minute piece, German (2009) identified three clusters around which terministic screens related to consumerism formed: optimism, comradeship and loyalty. The first was constructed by telling the story through first-person narration from the Jeep, who the author personifies as a humble and eager soldier, and by concluding the film on images of an Allied victory made possible by purchasing a Jeep (German, 2009). The titular Jeep forming a strong, unbreakable bond with an anonymous soldier establishes the second cluster: a relationship that the author claims equates material objects and consumption with powerful friendships (German, 2009). Finally, German (2009) described the film ending on the implication that the soldier and the Jeep would be together forever, which the author states is meant to equate brand loyalty to showing respect to war veterans, creating a cycle of guilt and redemption that can only be alleviated by consumerism.

Drawing from this type of research, I examine both textual and visual storytelling elements of the two films to both identify and interpret their terministic screens. Burke framed terministic screens solely in the context of textual mediums, which offer a treasure trove of interpretations but are not the dominant cultural force they once were. In the age of the Internet, the human eyes and mind are bombarded with a menagerie of images nearly every waking moment, whether by choice or simply by circumstance. Acknowledging this paradigm shift is not an indictment of Burke, but simply an extension of his ideas across a new frontier.

Marxism

The most basic tenet of Marxist theory is the concept of class struggle, the idea that the wealthy (bourgeoisie) and the proletariat (working class) are in constant conflict with one another, primarily due to the former exploiting the latter (Singer, 1980). Within this conceptualization of society is the idea of "alienation," where the working class are separated from the goods and services they produce and thus are robbed of both economic autonomy and human dignity (as cited in Singer, 1980, p. 46). The result of this separation is figures largely in both films, and is discussed in greater detail in each respective analysis chapter.

Marx has had considerable influence on the intertwined fields of rhetoric and criticism, particularly through his concept of ideology. According to McKerrow (1983), there are two conceptions of "ideology" within the study of rhetoric (p. 192). First, that ideology is a "unique, separate entity" that is expressed via rhetoric, as well as that distance exists between the rhetor and the ideology expressed (McKerrow, 1983, p. 192). Second, ideology is conceptualized as a "specialized rhetorical understanding" that is an

extension of rhetoric rather than a separate entity (McKerrow, 1983, p. 192). According to McKerrow (1983), the former allows for classifying discourses as belonging to specific ideologies by deciphering examples of said ideology's "argumentative premises" (p. 192). The latter, by contrast, views ideology as a "rhetorical construct" with no existence outside of its "expression as a symbol system," and so relies on principles unique to this rhetorical conception rather than simply classification and uncovering of ideological arguments and signifiers (p. 192). This thesis project falls into the former category, as it identifies the Marxist ideology of both films by way of terministic screens.

I chose terministic screens as my main instrument of analysis for several reasons. First, as a concept, terministic screens have a great deal of malleability. Burke (1966) insisted that the human mind is incapable of analyzing anything without actively or passively attaching a certain terminology to it, which carries the implication that terministic screens can be and are applied to most anything. Second, Marx states that the superstructure, and thus the ideology it promotes, is an all-encompassing and omnipresent force, and is dependent on the interpretative and assimilating powers of the human mind, which is itself reliant on terministic screens to exercise these powers (as cited in Singer, 1980). As a result, from a Burkean perspective, Marxist principles are firmly intertwined with terministic screens, and, as I later demonstrate, operate by means of various ISAs.

Ideology has also influenced the realm of criticism. For example, Wander (1984) wrote of a "tension" in academia between conceptualizing the university as an exclusive "ivory tower" separated from the masses, and as an accessible engine for change in the public and political spheres (p. 197). According to Wander (1984), a primary motivation

behind the former among American intellectuals is a mask of "apoliticism" used to avoid accusations of partisanship or fanaticism, which he claims is a far cry from the Marx-derived, anti-establishment habits of European intellectual circles (p. 197-198). Wander (1984) purported that "ideological criticism" is a vital obligation of academics, as it forces them to leave the comfort zone of the "world of ideas" and enter the "miasma," or dark and unpredictable environment, of the real world to make positive change (p. 198-199). An academic is, by definition, a thinker, but thinking has little impact unless it is used for a practical purpose, such as criticism. This thesis project operates on a similar premise, as both rhetorical and film criticism are excellent tools for understanding the causes and consequences of societal ills, such as those represented in my two chosen films.

Like Burke, other scholars have expanded upon Marxism in the realm of film and media studies over the years, forming neo-Marxism. According to Kendrick (1999), the films of James Cameron, namely *Aliens*, *The Abyss*, and *Titanic*, exhibit strong neo-Marxist themes. In *The Abyss*, Kendrick (1999) argued that the film's subtext is one of class struggle, with the blue-collar hero facing off against a military officer who is overtly a tool of a powerful corporation. In *Aliens*, the author asserted, the main heroine is a humble but noble laborer whose valiant efforts are consistently thwarted by a bureaucratic, malevolent and omnipresent megacorporation (Kendrick, 1999). However, Kendrick (1999) argued that *Titanic* is by far the most overtly neo-Marxist of the three films. In the film, argues Kendrick (1999), the titular ship serves as a microcosm of the class divide of nineteenth century Europe and America, with the third class passengers

confined to the lower decks by way of locked gates that condemn them to death in the ship's sinking.

Neo-Marxist thought has also expanded into areas of study outside of film criticism. Bakardjieva (2014) conducted an analysis of social media as a concept, building a framework known as the "McDonaldization of friendship" off of Weber's six principles of rationalization: efficiency, predictability, maximizing control over uncertainties, replacing human technology with non-human technology, and the tendency to produce a series of irrational consequences (p. 372). The author tied this to the Frankfurt School's critical theory, stating that a "formal rationality" has encroached on socialization by way of social media, producing advertising revenue by way of the "free labor of users" (Bakardjieva, 2014, p. 379). Bakardjeva (2014) asserted that this has created a communication form of capitalism, where socialization has become a mass-produced commodity.

Peck (2002) took a similar approach in a study of the effects of the Oprah Book Club. According to Peck (2002), the spike in literacy among Oprah Winfrey fans following the program's launch evokes the eternal philosophical conflict, "determination versus freedom" (p. 145). To contextualize changing scholarly tastes on the subject, Peck (2002) explained that scholars have drifted away from the Frankfurt School's "culture industry," where mass media is seen as all-powerful over mindless consumers, and towards a viewpoint oriented around audience-driven meaning making (p. 147). Peck (2002) asserted a compromise between the two extremes in the form of Sartre's "dialectic of signification," an idea rooted in neo-Marxism that states that each individual has their own "praxis" (means of self-determination) but said praxis is always conditioned by

circumstances and the praxes of others (p. 152-153). In all three of the above cases, Marxist principles are retained but are applied to a new subject matter, thus expanding Marxism beyond its unforeseen limits without sacrificing its original intent. This is the exact goal of this thesis project.

The major contribution I make to this type of research is a focus less on class struggle and more on the materialist conception of history, at least in terms of alienation and the superstructure. Whereas other researchers have examined how neo-Marxist elements are present in terms of plot and character, I expand that to include larger, socially conscious themes. In addition, my emphasis on dystopian science fiction allows for a greater exploration of how Marxist themes are used as a critique of the contemporary social trends depicted in each film. Each film constructs a fictional world where societal ills can be magnified for the sake of dramatic effect and biting commentary, making them a perfect intersection of both Marx and Burke.

Texts Used for Analysis

For this project, I watched the films *Modern Times* and *Soylent Green* for my analysis. I watched them in that order for two specific reasons. First, because this was the order in which they were produced. Second, my goal was to analyze not just changes between the two films, but to analyze changes in perspective in the five decades that transpired between them. Third, I engaged in a detailed textual analysis of both films, watching each of them twice and taking notes on a legal pad regarding plot devices, dialogue, visual elements, and sound effects to find the particular themes listed in the literature review and methods section.

Preview

The remainder of this project is the analysis of the two films and my concluding thoughts. First, there is the chapter analyzing *Modern Times*, in which I examine the terministic screens of dehumanization and the American Dream. Next is the chapter analyzing *Soylent Green*, in which I deconstruct the terministic screens of degradation and pollution, both of which operate on a sociological and individualized level. Finally, there is the conclusion chapter, in which I restate my findings from the analysis before moving on to both the theoretical and practical implications of this project, as well as the limitations that could be resolved by research projects conducted by myself or other scholars in the foreseeable future.

CHAPTER FOUR:

MODERN TIMES

Originally released in 1936, *Modern Times* is a mostly silent comedy starring Charlie Chaplin, who also wrote and directed the film, in the final outing as his iconic "Little Tramp" persona (Gehring, 2007). Lionized by leftists as a challenge to capitalism and derided by rightists as Communist propaganda, I argue that the film is rife with both Marxist themes and Burkean symbol systems. Through his strategic use of filmmaking techniques, namely the use of sound and visuals, Chaplin crafted strong humanist messages and themes, which carry a greater impact than text as film inherently resembles reality more closely than the written word. To reiterate what I outlined earlier, a terministic screen relies on constructing a particular worldview by means of coordination of terms and/or images. As I have argued, the medium of film allows for direct visual metaphors that simply cannot exist in print media. In this chapter, I relay how in *Modern Times*, Chaplin expresses his worldview by means of two specific terministic screens: 1) dehumanization and 2) the American Dream. This chapter discusses each of these screens as they appear throughout the film, and unpacks their thematic implications in relation to one or more specific ISAs. By ISAs, I refer to tangible systems through which society's ruling class exerts control over the proletariat (Althusser, 1970).

The Terministic Screen of Dehumanization

The screen of dehumanization is by far the most commonplace of the two screens. By dehumanization, I refer to the systemic process by which humanity, both in terms of the physical well-being of human bodies and the overall value placed on human emotion,

is disregarded and devalued by society. The film's opening shot is of an imposing ticking clock face, which is immediately followed by on-screen text claiming that the film tells a story of "humanity crusading in the pursuit of happiness" (Chaplin, 1936). In these first frames, the terministic screen of dehumanization is already being established. Human desire, in this case a desire for happiness, is posited against an inflexible, unfeeling and ultimately oppressive presence in the form of the clock. The clock face simultaneously represents the ISA of economics/industry, and by being positioned imposingly over the above message, this ISA is shown to discourage true happiness in favor of obedience to efficiency.

This message is also reminiscent of the Marxist concept of "alienation," where people are barred from the fruits of their labors and thus are cut off from much of their ability to maintain both their independence and relations to others (Singer, 1980, p. 46). As this analysis demonstrates, the protagonists of this film are consistently denied access to the prosperity that their labors are responsible for and suffer great emotional and physical consequences as a result. In addition, the positioning of the clock face overpowers the text, subtly implying that the efficient nature of labor is held in higher regard than the actual benefits of said labor. In turn, this low status implies a societal reduction of workers to mere cogs in the proverbial machine rather than thinking, autonomous beings.

Another instance of alienation occurs after the credits, which are followed by a montage of sheep being herded into pens, with a solitary black sheep featured prominently in the otherwise white flock. The camera is positioned in a downward facing angle, which encourages the viewer to look down upon the animals and experience pity

for them. This image then cross-fades into shots of urban commuters emerging from a subway station in an equally mindless fashion, with mass transit and urban centers symbolizing the ISA of economics/industry as conducive to such a restrictive mentality (Chaplin, 1936). Again, the terministic screen of dehumanization is present, with the film directly comparing the hustle and bustle of industrial society with farm animals, creatures that are exploited to serve their human masters through physical labor and are seen as having no value beyond that. Such deliberate commentary is indicative of Brummett's (1984) concept of using visual media as "equipment for living," meaning a way for audiences to better contextualize real-world experiences (p. 162). By presenting the unhealthy state of modern society in cinematic format, Chaplin provides a simple but powerful rhetorical message that highlights the loss of human individuality in a mechanized world.

Another instance of this theme appears in the film's first full scene, which takes place in a large factory. The first shots of the building's interior show the employees dwarfed by the machinery, bustling about in identical, grease-stained uniforms and performing repetitive task in order to keep the assembly line moving (Chaplin, 1936). In this sequence, any potential sense of community among the workers is replaced by a stifling atmosphere of conformity, with the mass production model, itself representing the ISA of economics/industry, encouraging them to adopt a mindlessly efficient demeanor akin to that of a beehive. The production design of this scene is reflective of Althusser's "mise en scene of interpellation," with the film showing individuals surrendering their autonomy to the interpellated mess of industrial society (as cited in Downing, 2013, p. 5). This interpellation is continued throughout the film, but the striking visual contrast

between the workers and the machines they operate is the most obvious example of this, and thus one of the most effective.

Another effective example of the dehumanization screen is when the film introduces the Boss of the factory. He is first shown in his sterile white office, struggling to properly put together a jigsaw puzzle by placing pieces into places where they obviously cannot fit. In contrast to his employees, he wears well-tailored and spotless clothing. His attire and his engaging in a leisurely pastime serve to highlight the film's themes of class division. In this case, his employees are keeping his business running while he does not contribute in any discernable manner. However, he does keep tabs on his workers by means of a large video screen built into the wall, which acts a Big Brother-style surveillance system that allows him both observe and make announcements to the factory (Chaplin, 1936). The corresponding screens are stationed throughout the factory, varying in size but always positioned to be above the workers' heads, thus further emphasizing his superiority. Through his announcements, the film strategically breaks its silence, with the booming, masculine voice of authority echoing through the factory and intimidating his employees into submission. The authoritarian power structure of the factory, coupled with the framing of technology as a tool of the powerful, serves to further problematize the dehumanization of the workers, as well as the ISA of economics/industry that is conducive to such oppressive practices through its emphasis on productivity above all.

These oppressive practices are also featured when the Boss then agrees to test out an automated feeding machine on one of his workers. The salesman's recorded voice promises the machine will "eliminate the lunch hour" (Chaplin, 1936). The machine is a

long, upright board similar to a hospital stretcher, with straps used to keep the user in place while they are fed by a number of automated arms. Chaplin's character, which I refer to as the Tramp, is chosen as the guinea pig for the machine's test run (Chaplin, 1936). The experiment soon goes horribly awry; the device malfunctions by going too fast, inadvertently feeds him a bolt, and finally breaks down altogether. This test puts the Tramp through a painful and humiliating experience. The Boss rescinds his acceptance of the salesman's offer, not based on the suffering of the Tramp but on the impracticality of the machine. In this scene, the dehumanization screen is continued, with the ISA of economics/industry in the form of the Boss favoring productivity over the well-being of human bodies. Althusser described ideology as "pure illusion," meaning utterly dependent on the arrangement of visual and audio cues (as cited in Downing, 2013, p. 8). As a result, said cues, in this case mechanization, can easily be rearranged in order to invert or satirize an ideology, as Chaplin does with industrial capitalism and mass production.

This theme is continued in one of the film's most iconic scenes. The Tramp falls onto a conveyor built and winds up stuck in between the gears of the machinery, erratically moving back and forth between them repeatedly before finally being freed by one of his co-workers (Chaplin, 1936). The fact that the Tramp is saved by a co-worker rather than a manager is telling, as it shows the working class as having more empathy and compassion than their employers. This furthers the distance between the worker and the Boss. The experience is traumatic enough to give Chaplin a nervous breakdown; he wildly vandalizes the factory by using his wrenches to unscrew anything resembling bolts, including the buttons on a woman's dress, before being arrested and hospitalized

(Chaplin, 1936). Through this sequence, the terministic screen of dehumanization is continued. The image of a human being trapped inside a machine is poignant in and of itself, reflecting the oppressive power technology can hold over human life. However, Tramp's proletarian garb adds another layer of commentary, indicating that the while the working class are the most responsible for operating such machinery, they also suffer the most from technology. Chaplin paints the ISA of economics/industry as being indifferent to the suffering it causes in human beings, as exemplified by the Tramp's incarceration despite the factory being responsible for breaking his sanity.

The use of visual cues is common in films that aim to illustrate societal ills and contradiction. For example, in his critique of the 2003 comedy *Good Bye Lenin!*, Downing (2013) dissected the visual cues the film used to comment on the end of the Cold War and East Germany's transition from communism to capitalism. In the film, the red banners of the German Democratic Republic are replaced by red banners advertising Coca-Cola, with the latter being placed prominently on the side of tall buildings, thus occupying the same positions as their communist predecessors (Downing, 2013). Through this strategic placing of visual cues, Downing (2013) argued, the filmmakers indicate that capitalism employs tactics akin to that of communism, thus undermining the dichotomy often depicted between the two ideologies. In the case of *Modern Times*, the visual cue is the image of a man painfully pinned by the gears of industry, reflecting the human suffering inflicted and tolerated by an industrialized world. This troubles the idea that technological progress in and of itself is vital to human happiness, an idea which imagery such as gears are often used to symbolize.

After his arrest and hospitalization, the Tramp is soon declared rehabilitated and released back into society, but he is now without any form of employment. His release is intercut with a montage of an imposing world filled with traffic and industry, a montage of speeding cars and factories belching out smoke, as well as shots of a city skyline composed solely of featureless, dark skyscrapers (Chaplin, 1936). Dehumanization is present here through a picture of an immense and unsympathetic society, exemplified by the visual contrast of the down-on-his-luck Tramp and the imposing city skyline, creating an overall sensation of helplessness and lack of direction. At the same time, the ISA of economics/industry is shown as encouraging development and efficiency but having little regard for the struggles of the less fortunate.

In a later scene, the film's dehumanizing atmosphere changes, shifting away from helplessness and towards a feeling of active persecution. As the Tramp meanders about the city, he spots a red flag fall off the back of a truck. Picking it up for the purpose of returning it, he unwittingly begins marching in front of crowd of peaceful Communist protestors, who hold signs demanding fair pay and better working conditions (Chaplin, 1936). The police soon arrive on the scene, roughly breaking up the rally and mistakenly arresting Chaplin for being the protest's leader. The dehumanization screen is again present, with the ISA of economics/industry being shown to lead to mass unemployment and discontent. Simultaneously, the ISA of law enforcement is shown to be abusive and in service of the unjust status quo rather than protecting the vulnerable. According to Althusser, police forces straddle the line between an ISA and a "Repressive State Apparatus," a public domain organization that operates mainly through violence or force (as cited in Gao, 2015, p. 473). For my purposes, law enforcement will be referred to as

an ISA, because though it operates through physical force, said force is for the purposes of enforcing the dominant ideology the film is satirizing.

At this point, the film's leading lady, credited only as a "gamin" and portrayed by Paulette Goddard, is introduced. She is shown living in a dilapidated shack with her chronically unemployed father and younger sisters, serving as a surrogate mother to the latter (Chaplin, 1936). In this scene, the dehumanization screen manifests itself through poverty. Her home is shown as cramped and filthy, with minimal furniture and no visible amenities of any kind, which contrasts strongly with the pristine and technologically advanced appearance of the Boss's office at the factory earlier in the film. Through this simple but powerful contrast, Chaplin shows the ISA of economics/industry as being conducive to abysmal living conditions and near starvation for the unemployed, and thus undermining industrial capitalism's claims of prosperity for all.

Meanwhile, the Tramp is locked up in the local jailhouse. The film depicts prison as rigid, stifling and authoritarian. The prisoners are under the intimidating gaze of the guards at all times. In spite of this, the Tramp still does everything in his power to avoid being released or paroled, seeing his cell as an escape from the poverty and miserable unemployment in the outside world (Chaplin, 1936). Here, dehumanization is shown in a more subtle way, as a state for the Tramp to avoid rather than a state being actively experienced. The Tramp manages to make his cell fairly comfortable, with furnishings, a dining table with proper silverware, and a framed picture of Abraham Lincoln on the wall, the latter a subtle hint to the feeling of emancipation that prison offers to the Tramp (Chaplin, 1936). Throughout this scene, the ISA of criminal justice is shown to incentivize passive behavior and institutionalization rather than true rehabilitation or

productivity among prisoners, thus subverting the notion of prison as being an avenue for the betterment of society.

The film then returns to the mood of active persecution. Goddard's father takes part in a loud but peaceful worker's rally, only to be fatally shot and the protestors scattered by the police. The police go unpunished for shooting an unarmed man, and the newspapers dismiss the strikers as an "unruly mob" (Chaplin, 1936). This time, dehumanization is shown through both the protestors and their antagonists. Those in the rally are dressed in dirty, worn out clothing and hold up signs asking for fair wages and safer working conditions (Chaplin, 1936). By contrast, the police are dressed in clean, well-tailored uniforms and the newspaper is printed on high-quality paper, a subtle but poignant contrast to highlight the powerlessness of the working class in American society.

While the ISA of law enforcement is shown as amoral and lacking accountability, the ISA of the news media is shown as biased against the poor and unemployed. News media is a part of the larger ISA of communications, which is in and of itself vital to any ruling order. For example, the Chinese Communist Party strictly regulates and censors TV and the Internet, rejecting or rewording any bit of news or fiction that the government deems as threatening to China's "social contentment and cohesiveness" (Gao, 2015, p. 478). By showing the media as essentially the lap dog of the wealthy, Chaplin further problematizes the dehumanization normalized by twentieth century American society, as well as highlighting the specific institutions that encourage such attitudes.

Over the course of the film, the Tramp and Goddard meet and begin a romance. The couple spends much of their time on the streets, but the situation becomes less dire after the Tramp regains a factory job. However, he soon manages to accidentally pin his supervisor inside the gears of the machinery, similar to what had happened to him earlier. Chaplin initially attempts to save him, but the rescue is interrupted by the factory's whistle signaling the beginning of lunch hour (Chaplin, 1936). The Tramp stops to eat, showing just the slightest amount of self-awareness by sharing his meal with his supervisor. Yet again, technology is associated with dehumanization, with the supervisor's head emerging from the machinery in a manner that indicates that mechanization holds humanity back, rather than easing any burdens. The ISA of economics/industry is further problematized, as it is depicted as encouraging the dominance of productivity and rigid scheduling over human habits, ethics and even basic common sense.

The Tramp soon also loses this job, but Goddard is able to secure employment as a singing waitress at a nearby restaurant. However, the police soon come for her, charging her with vagrancy, forcing her and the Tramp to flee the scene. As a result, she naturally loses her job and thus is certain to face continued unemployment and poverty, which is what lead to her charge of vagrancy in the first place. The dehumanization screen is present for the final time here, with society equating homelessness and unemployment with criminality and thus meeting it with harshness rather than compassion. This is reinforced through the ISA of law enforcement, which is shown to prevent people from breaking the cycle of poverty rather than actually putting an end to the "crime" of vagrancy.

The Terministic Screen of the American Dream

To clarify, I use the phrase "American Dream" to refer to two specific ideas. The first is the most idealized, even stereotypical, image of the American Dream, that of a middle-class family residing comfortably in a suburban home with a white picket fence. The second is more general in nature and refers to the larger concept of a comfortable life, free of material hardships and wants. I draw this definition from the writings of Fisher (1973), who split the American Dream into two interconnected myths, the "materialistic success myth" and the "moralistic myth of brotherhood" (as cited in Winn, 2003, p. 308). According to Fisher (1973), the materialistic myth is built on the "puritan work ethic" and the values of "effort, persistence, 'playing the game', initiative, self-reliance, achievement, and success" (p. 161). By contrast, the moralistic myth is built on phrase "all men are created equal" from the Declaration of Independence, as well as the values of "tolerance, charity, compassion, and true regard for the dignity and worth of each and every individual" (Fisher, 1973, p. 161). This framework is key to the thematic elements of *Modern Times*, as the film interrogates the contrast between the ideals of the American Dream and their unattainability for people of certain social strata.

Though this screen is far less prevalent in the film than the dehumanization screen, the scenes where it does appear are essential to both the film's plot and overall portrayal of the ills of twentieth century life. In his writings, Burke (1966) describes the Aristotelian concept of "entelechy," which purports that each and every being strives for total perfection among its own kind (p. 17). In applying this principle to humans, Burke (1966) saw this intrinsic perfectionism as having the potential to both drive humanity forward and lead to destructive behavior. Through its depiction of the American Dream

as a terministic screen, *Modern Times* also shows this dualistic potential, demonstrating the appeal of the American Dream's materialistic comforts but also the economic disparity required to maintain that level of comfort.

While on the run from the law, the Tramp and Goddard stop for a respite in front of a cozy house in the suburbs. The two start fantasizing about living in the house themselves, painting an idealized portrait of suburban life with a shiny living space and a steady supply of fresh food, including their own cow for milk (Chaplin, 1936). The pair's daydream is soon disrupted by a police officer, who promptly shoos the two away from the property. In this scene, the terministic screen of the American Dream is on display, namely the above contrast between the appeal of said Dream and its unattainability. The ISA of the family, in this case the idealized middle class family, is present as a goal for which the lead characters aspire to but have very little chance of achieving. There is a whiff of utopia in the dream itself, but this is a fantasy interrupted by a dystopian reality. This ability to both prioritize and satirize a societal ideal simultaneously is another factor of the terministic screen in a visual medium, as such a balance is easier to attain with visuals than with text.

During the course of their misadventures, Chaplin and Goddard sneak into a department store afterhours. This place acts as a sort of materialistic wonderland for them, granting them access to delectable sweets and soft, warm beds for the night. Most notably, the two have a delightful time in the toy department, using the largest room as their own personal skating rink, even becoming so lost in their excitement that they nearly fall off the stairwell's railing (Chaplin, 1936). All their wants and needs are at their fingertips, but the desire given most priority is in the bedroom display. Goddard

relishes in having such a comfortable refuge, with her lily-white robes and comforter emphasize her joy and serenity. The American Dream is present here as well, but only as a temporary escape from the harshness of reality. Again, hints of utopia are present, but are undercut by the cold, hard fact that this escapade can only last until the store opens in the morning. In a notable change of pace, the ISA of economics/industry is shown as helpful to the poor when removed from the actual capitalist structure of production and consumption, instead displaying a sort of unofficial redistribution of wealth.

This depiction deviates considerably from more traditional portrayals of the American Dream in Hollywood films. In his analysis of the films *Wall Street* and *The Firm*, Winn (2003) explained that the American Dream is often shown in a light that "communicates" or "rationalizes" the "inegalitarian" class system of US society, often dismissing the social limits faced by the working class as symptoms of "personal failures" rather than systemic problems (p. 307). As a result, such films serve to support the myth of "abounding success opportunities" for all Americans, and thus continue to normalize a rigidly vertical class hierarchy (Winn, 2003, p. 307). *Modern Times* subverts this trope, acknowledging the barriers to upward mobility without demonizing material comfort or items.

The final shot of the film is of the main characters walking down an open road into the sunset. Though their future is uncertain, the two are nonetheless armed with the hope of a better tomorrow (Chaplin, 1936). In this closing moment, the American Dream is again present, albeit in an even more ambiguous form. The ISA of family is shown as providing comfort in troubled times, with the Tramp and Goddard providing physical and emotional comfort to one another in spite of their bleak circumstances. The ISA of

economics/industry is shown to create such harsh conditions, but still grants the possibility of a comfortable existence, no matter how unlikely or unattainable such a thing may be.

In conclusion, *Modern Times* contains two terministic screens. First, there is the screen of dehumanization, which refers to the systemic devaluing of both human emotion and the physical health of human bodies. This screen is present in the film's portrayal of technology and industrial economics as encouraging radical class inequality behind the empty promise of prosperity for all. Second, there is the screen of the American Dream, which refers to both the stereotypical image of an idealized suburban home life and the broader idea of a life without material wants. The former is demonstrated in the main characters' fantasy of a middle class existence and home ownership, while the latter is shown in their fruitless but unrelenting pursuit of steady employment and a home of their own. Combined, these screens impart an ideology that challenges the notion that technological advancement inherently betters society as a whole, instead depicting mechanization as a barrier to upward mobility and personal happiness.

CHAPTER FIVE:

SOYLENT GREEN

Loosely based on the novel *Make Room, Make Room!* by Harry Harrison, Richard Fleischer's Soylent Green was originally released in 1973. Described by one critic as "background becoming foreground," *Soylent Green*'s visuals and production design convey strong themes of environmental devastation and loss of humanity (Knipfel, 2017). These themes often overshadow the film's standard murder mystery narrative, and manifest themselves in the form of two specific terministic screens: the screen of degradation and the screen of pollution. The former refers to the wearing down of humanity, both on a larger sociological level and of the individual human spirit. The latter is similar, referring to both environmental devastation and a corrupting influence on human society. As in the previous chapter, each respective screen will be analyzed in the above order as it appears over the course of the film through both dialogue and visual storytelling elements, and each will be linked with one or more ISAs as well.

The Terministic Screen of Degradation

The film is set in the near future of 2022, in a world ravaged by pollution and overpopulation, resulting in widespread poverty, crippling shortages of food and water, a worldwide energy crisis and year-round heat and humidity due to the greenhouse effect. After the opening montage, the film's title card appears over a still image of the polluted skyline of New York City. This is followed by on-screen text informing the audience that the year is 2022, the setting is New York, and the city's population has grown to forty million (Fleischer, 1973). The image of a smog-covered New York, coupled with the on-screen exposition, is the first sign of the screen of degradation. A major metropolitan

center has been reduced to a dirty and overcrowded slum, and the use of New York City, itself a hub of American industrial might, ties this state of being to the ISA of technology.

The hero, a police detective named Thorn (Charlton Heston), is introduced as he watches a television interview with the governor of New York state. Before the interview begins, the host states that the program is sponsored by the Soylent Corporation, a conglomerate later revealed to have monopolized the food supply for half of the world's population (Fleischer, 1973). The host advertises the company's newest product, Soylent Green, a processed wafer said to consist of plankton harvested from the oceans and reminds the audience that due to high demand the product must be strictly rationed, ending with the slogan "Tuesday is Soylent Green Day" (Fleischer, 1973). Through this broadcast, the screen of degradation is firmly established. The replacement of the traditionally consumer-driven American economy with an overburdened ration system is an indicator of the scale of this degradation. The demand for food has become so great that such communist-like planning is a necessity, showing the ISA of economics as conducive to such shortages and to corporate monopolization of resources.

Another example of this sociological degradation is the apartment belonging to Thorn and his partner Sol Roth (Edward G. Robinson). The flat is shown to consist of single room, with one rickety bed per person and an uncovered bulb serving as the flat's sole light source (Fleischer, 1973). No decorations are visible, and the power supply is a series of car batteries sitting along the wall. Later in the film, such dwellings are revealed to be the standard for the middle class, with the audience being shown a mob of homeless people sleeping on the apartment complex's main stairwell. This exemplifies the screen of degradation, showing that the ISA of economics has caused the American standard of

living to decline sharply as a result of overpopulation. In addition, Sol is referred to as a "book," a slang term for police researcher, and Thorn casually mentions that over twenty million people are unemployed in New York City alone who would "kill" to take their jobs (Fleischer, 1973). The moniker "book" is indicative of degradation, as it implies that trees are now far too scarce to be processed into books, and so society must rely on human memory alone to store its knowledge. Combined with Thorn's comments about mass employment, this moniker also suggests that mass illiteracy has become a feature of this world, further showing the degradation of society's ability to function properly.

Sol derides the spoiled margarine on their dinner, which consists of a single medium-sized wafer, as "tasteless, odorless crud" and refuses to eat it, while Thorn does so purely because he lacks an alternative (Fleischer, 1973). The apartment then experiences a power fluctuation, which Sol fixes by peddling on a stationary bike to charge the car batteries lining (Fleischer, 1973). In this scene, the screen of degradation is continued, with the quality of food being reduced to paltry, unpalatable scraps and electricity being unreliable at best. The ISA of economics is further implied to be the root of such conditions.

Degradation is emphasized the most in one of the film's first exterior shots. Outside Thorn and Sol's apartment building, the streets are littered with rusting, derelict cars, many of which are used by the crowds of homeless people as a shantytown (Fleischer, 1973). The degradation screen is shown as a crippling societal problem; mass homelessness is now tolerated as a simple street hazard to be braved on an everyday basis. The ISA of economics is again condemned here, and the capitalist system of

production and consumption is depicted as unable to provide employment or bearable conditions for the majority of society.

The degradation screen is even more salient when the film shows the other extreme of this economic disparity. Simonson, a wealthy Soylent executive, lives in a spacious apartment full of well-made furnishings and adorned with colorful wall art and pottery. This starkly contrasts with the cramped, utilitarian living space of Thorn and Sol and the shantytowns of the homeless (Fleischer, 1973). Simonson lives with Shirl (Leigh Taylor-Young), who is described as "furniture," a slang term for concubine, who comes with his apartment (Fleischer, 1973). As a present, Simonson gives Shirl a Computer Space arcade cabinet; an item which no doubt wastes considerable electricity (Fleischer, 1973). Here, the screen of degradation is made even more palpable -- the film confirming that a privileged few retain a prosperous, comfortable existence in this impoverished world, indifferent to the suffering of the masses. Degradation is also shown as having negatively affected the status of women, with Shirl (and others like her) prostituting themselves to the wealthy to escape poverty and starvation. The ISAs of economics and law enforcement are condemned as being complicit in this societal trend.

Simonson is later beaten to death in his apartment, and Thorn is called in to investigate the murder. In the process of searching for clues, Thorn helps himself to Simonson's food and liquor, as well as the hot water and soap in the bathroom, running both over his arms and face in pure ecstasy (Fleischer, 1973). The screen of degradation is shown in Thorn's reaction to Simonson's affluence, treating creature comforts that modern audiences would take for granted as a miraculous relief from his hardscrabble life, thus emphasizing the collapse of this future society. In addition, the ISA of

economics is further problematized, as it contributes to stark class division and turning a blind eye to the unfairness of a supposedly impartial rationing system.

A "sanitation squad" takes Simonson's body away to a "waste disposal" plant via garbage truck (Fleischer, 1973). As he is carried off, Shirl faintly recalls that her grandmother's death was marked by a funeral, a practice implied to have been long forgotten by this world (Fleischer, 1973). The degradation screen is taken even further in this scene, with human remains now being considered waste akin in the same manner of garbage rather than treated with any respect or care. The ISA of technology is also condemned, with the garbage truck symbolizes the indifference to human life normalized in this world.

Numerous examples of degradation are present in Thorn's interactions with Sol. Thorn gives Sol some of Simonson's things, namely a large cake of soap, new paper, pencils, a bottle of liquor and a slab of beef (Fleischer, 1973). Sol treats the haul as though it were a treasure trove, but is moved to tears over his shock and awe at the sight of real meat, lamenting how humanity could have reduced itself to such squalor (Fleischer, 1973). Sol and Thorn later dine on the food taken from Simonson's flat, and react to every bite with sheer, rapturous joy. Sol states that he "hasn't eaten like this in ages," while Thorn states that he "never ate like this" in his life (Fleischer, 1973). In both of these instances, the screen of degradation is tied to food. By reducing the most basic necessities to a luxury, the misery and scarcity faced by this future society is emphasized intensely, as is the screen of degradation. The ISA of economics is again derided, shown as unable to provide proper sustenance for all but the wealthiest of society.

At the end of this scene, Thorn sarcastically chides Sol for his nostalgic yearning. Sol shrugs off Thorn's comments, stating that in his youth "people were always rotten, but the world was beautiful," and laments that he should have "gone home" (a euphemism for euthanasia) a long time ago (Fleischer, 1973). The degradation screen is present on both the personal and societal levels, with Sol insisting that natural beauty is virtually extinct in this world and that a peaceful death is preferable to living in such a miserable place. The ISA of technology is subtly indicated as the primary contributor to this state of mind, as the advancement of industrialization is the main factor in the destruction of the natural world.

A major symptom of the personal level of degradation is a sense of hopelessness, which is explored further in Thorn's romantic interactions with Shirl. The couple spends a romantic evening in Simonson's condo, with Shirl tempting Thorn with the promise of a hot bath and air conditioning strong enough to make the apartment very cold "like winter used to be" (Fleischer, 1973). Later on, Shirl suggests to Thorn that they run off to another city to start a new life, an idea that Thorn rejects on the grounds that all cities are "like this" (Fleischer, 1973). Shirl counters by suggesting that they could live in the countryside, which Thorn also shoots down as the remaining farms are "like fortresses," as what little arable land that remains must be protected at all costs by military-grade security (Fleischer, 1973). The screen of degradation confirmed as omnipresent through this exchange, and thus strips the film's characters of any true sense of agency in determining their fate. As a result, the degradation screen's two levels, individual and societal, are intertwined with one another, and thus are given a more powerful impact.

Thorn learns that Simonson visited a church several days before his murder, and goes there to investigate further. Upon reaching the front door, he spots a dead woman lying on the steps, with her young child tied to her wrist with wire. Thorn brings the child inside with him, leaving her in the care of a nun while he goes to talk with the priest. The church is an overburdened refuge for the homeless, packed with wall-to-wall bunks and sleeping bags to the point where there is no room left for actual religious services (Fleischer, 2017). After some brief questioning, the priest reveals that Simonson came to the church for the purpose of confession, an event that stuck in the priest's memory as he claims that the clergy "don't see rich people here anymore" (Fleischer, 1973). In this scene, the degradation screen is shown as having a direct effect on the ISA of religion, reducing the institution of church, often seen as a pillar of the community into yet another place for the destitute to rest their heads. In addition, the class divide of this world is further emphasized, with the wealthy now utterly detached from faith and the sense of community it often instilss, and thus from the suffering of the underclass.

The screen of degradation appropriately reaches its climax in the film's third act. On "Soylent Green Day," people wait in line for hours on end in the vain hope of getting proper rations, with one woman loudly protesting that after standing in line "the whole lousy day" she received only one quarter of a kilo of Soylent Green (Fleischer, 1973). The supply of Soylent Green is soon exhausted, which causes the crowd to riot in spite of warnings from the police. To aid in riot control, the police call in dump trucks known as "scoops" to pick up a number of unlucky rioters to frighten the remainder away (Fleischer, 1973). In this sequence, the degradation screen is shown again through the imagery of "human garbage," with the rioters being picked up by the trucks in the same

manner as debris or refuse. The ISAs of law enforcement and technology are condemned simultaneously here, with the police shown as abusive to the masses and the dump trucks, among the only functional vehicles present, being utilized for the sole purpose of causing grievous bodily harm.

Later, Sol heads to a public library to research the Simonson case. The building's exterior is old and run-down, but the inside is home to a large steel door labeled "Supreme Exchange: Authorized Books Only" (Fleischer, 1973). Sol is granted entry, and is greeted by a committee of fellow researchers consisting solely of elderly people approximately his age (Fleischer, 1973). With the help of the Exchange, Sol discovers the terrible truth that Soylent Green is made out of human remains. Distraught at this revelation, Sol remarks "Good God," to which the Exchange leader retorts, "What God, Mr. Roth? Where will we find him?" (Fleischer, 1973). Sol is taken aback by this comment, before wryly chuckling and stating that it is finally time for him to "go home" (Fleischer, 1973). In this scene, Sol embodies the personal level of the degradation screen, with his decision to take his own life reflecting the dismal and inescapable state of the world. In addition, the depiction of the Exchange committee as consisting of senior citizens is indicative of degradation, with Sol and his fellow "books" being shown as relics of a time when literacy was commonplace rather than a rarity.

Sol arrives at the brightly lit and well-maintained euthanasia clinic, greeted by a young attractive nurse who opens the door for him, letting out a comforting gust of air conditioning (Fleischer, 1973). The building's interior is equally pristine, with spotless floors and soothing, pastel-colored murals decorating the walls (Fleischer, 1973). After his life is terminated, Sol's body is taken to a "waste disposal" plant, again via dump

truck and tailed by Thorn (Fleischer, 2017). After sneaking inside the facility undetected, Thorn sees the bodies from the trucks being loaded onto a conveyor belt, and is horrified to discover the corpses being process into Soylent Green wafers (Fleischer, 2017). In both these scenes, the sociological level of the degradation screen is shown in regards to the human body. So little value is placed on human life that euthanasia is practiced on a whim, and such facilities are kept in pristine condition, consuming resources that could just as easily be used to repair the city's crumbling infrastructure. Likewise, human bodies are now being turned into literal consumer goods, having become the only viable food source in a world of depleted natural resources. These two instances are the pinnacle of the film's degradation screen, depicting a society that seeks to hasten death rather than attempt to improve the quality of life, and also condemns the ISA of technology as the mechanism through which humanity will ultimate consume and destroy itself.

The Terministic Screen of Pollution

The film opens on a tracking shot of a black-and-white photo in an old-timey frame. The photo is of a group of nineteenth century American pioneers, standing in front of a simple log cabin surrounding on all sides by woodlands (Fleischer, 1973). The combination of historical setting and the monochrome cue gives the photo a distant yet inviting feel, creating a sense of rural simplicity against which the terministic screen of pollution presented throughout the rest of the film is contrasted. This still image transitions to a montage of industrialization, with black and white shots of streetcars, steamships, early automobiles and airplanes (Fleischer, 1973). The transitions between these photos are slow and smooth, fading gently from one image to the next. The musical

score is the same, a soft and melodic piece that compliments the placid feel of the montage.

The montage then shifts to images of cityscapes, mass-produced automobiles and oil fields, with the transitions becoming faster and choppier while the music accelerates and becomes more intense (Fleischer, 1973). The photos then abruptly switch from black-and-white to color. As the urban density shown continues to grow, shots of poverty, social unrest and environmental damage are added into the mix (Fleischer, 1973). At first, these disheartening pictures are shown only in a subliminal way, appearing only for fractions of seconds between longer shots of the more uplifting images. However, these depressing photos soon overtake the shots indicating progress, and the musical score slows again to indicate this newfound sense of misery. This is the first sign of the screen of pollution, with this montage framing the Industrial Revolution not as a boon to humanity but rather its ultimate undoing. Montage is an effective method for conveying both emotion and information with no dialogue, and similar uses of visual storytelling are present throughout the film's running time (Stam, 2000).

Among the subtler of these visual methods is the use of a green filter over many the film's exterior, daytime shots (Fleischer, 1973). According to Bellantoni (2005), as a storytelling tool, green is a "dichotomous color," often used to represent either "health and vitality" or "danger and decay" (p. 159). In the case of *Soylent Green*, the sickly hue utilized denotes the latter, signifying the suffocating humidity and smog that have become features of this dystopian world. This cements the pollution screen in the audience's mind, showing that the air, easily the most basic of natural resources, has been tainted to the point of mild toxicity.

During a conversation with Thorn, Sol complains that the world's "scientific magicians" have decimated the Earth's biosphere and climate, resulting in the miserable living conditions they now face (Fleischer, 1973). Sol waxes nostalgic for the world he knew in his youth, when "food was food" rather than the inedible, processed rations they are forced to subsist on in the present, creating a slightly utopian contrast for his present dystopian existence (Fleischer, 1973). Though only a brief line, Sol's snide remarks about scientists reflect a shift in the attitude toward the scientific community in American society. In a 2002 reprint of *Silent Spring*, the author states that in 1960s American "science was god." The public perceived scientists as possessing "divine wisdom" and granted them a "presumption of beneficence," so any criticism of the scientific community was taboo (Carson, 2002). By referring to scientific minds in such a snide manner, Sol embodies the after-effects of this shift from blind faith in technological progress to a more environmentally aware mindset of the American public, which further cements the pollution screen.

The pollution screen is also present in seemingly minor plot points. Shirl, accompanied by Simonson's bodyguard Fielding (Chuck Connors), are sent to pick up their boss's meager groceries, consisting of celery stalks, tomatoes, a head of lettuce and a single slice of beef, the latter of which is treated as a rare, invaluable commodity, at a total cost of two hundred and seventy-nine dollars (Fleischer, 1973). Similarly, Thorn goes to investigate Fielding's apartment, suspecting him of conspiring to kill Simonson. Upon his arrival at the door, Fielding's mistress throws a jar of strawberry jam down the incinerator chute before letting Thorn in, as such an item is said to cost one hundred and fifty dollars a jar, far beyond Fielding's salary and thus an indicator of him taking part in

foul play (Fleischer, 1973). In both of these scenes, the pollution screen suggests scarcity. Basic nutritious food items have become prohibitively expensive, a fact further emphasized by these being the only such edibles to appear in the film. These scenes frame the ISA of economics negatively, showing that the wealthy elite can easily bypass the overburdened ration system for more palatable, filling meals while the masses must subsist off of processed table scraps.

The pollution screen also relates to Burkean concepts outside of terministic screens, especially in the euthanasia scene. Sol is escorted to a hospital bed where is given a (presumably) poisoned drink, and upon his drinking it the staff helps him into a comfortable reclined position. The room is lit up by a fluorescent orange light, after which a large video screen on the wall in front of him is activated. The screen begins playing a montage of nature footage, depicting pristine forests, clear oceans, smog free skies and a menageries of animals, all set to a medley of classical pieces, most notably Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony (Fleischer, 1973). The combination of music and imagery creates a utopian atmosphere, a stark contrast to the putrid, rotting cityscape shown throughout the rest of the film.

Thorn arrives and observes the experience from a viewing window, and is moved to tears by the world as it was before he was born, going so far as to say, "How could I even imagine?" (Fleischer, 1973). The pollution screen is juxtaposed with the musical montage, especially in the use of the Beethoven piece. Beethoven was an avid lover of nature, and would often retreat to the countryside to work on his pieces in seclusion (Sadie, 2001). By using this composition, the film similarly portrays the now-extinct

natural world as an escape from the misery of industrialized society, and this contrast further reinforces the screen of pollution in a wholly negative light.

This sequence is rife with Burke's concept of catharsis, both in physical and emotional terms. Burke defined "catharsis" as a "remedy for pollution," an act of "cleansing" that produces "material offscourings," meaning things to which the pollution is transferred and must then be disposed of (as cited in Hawhee, 2009, p. 144). In addition, Burke drew his definition of "catharsis" from the Aristotelian concept of "catharsis," which refers to a "pleasurable telos of tragedy's pain and destruction," often achieved via external means like drugs or words (as cited in Hawhee, 2009, p. 136). In choosing to end his own life, Sol seeks a catharsis from an irreversibly polluted world, a purification that can only be achieved by ingesting a lethal substance. As a result, Sol's deceased body becomes a material offscouring, to be disposed off as waste. In addition, Burke claimed that emotional catharsis is equal to "bodily purging," and that laughter and tears served as "end-products" of such a catharsis (as cited in Hawhee, 2009, p. 140). Thorn's sobbing at the sight of the nature footage is an example of an emotional catharsis, a release for the resentment of the impoverished, dirty world that he has inhabited his whole life. Both of these elements reinforce the pollution screen, showing that the consequences of environmental devastation inevitably wear down the human spirit to depressing lows.

Thorn is chased from the disposal facility by Fielding, and is mortally wounded in a gunfight between the two in the church Thorn visited earlier. As he is carried away on a stretcher through the crowds of the homeless, he shouts the iconic line "Soylent Green is people!" and the film freeze-frames on his bloodied hand reaching upwards from the

stretcher in desperation (Fleischer, 1973). This frame then dissolves to the same nature montage used in Sol's death scene, again accompanied by the Pastoral Symphony. The reveal of the Soylent Corporation as villainous is akin to Durkheim's concept of the "polluted totem," a thing that serves as the "collective symbol" of society that has become tainted by unsavory or nefarious elements, and so must be destroyed and rebuilt in its uncorrupted form (as cited in Corry, 2016). As the world's largest supplier of foodstuffs, Soylent is undeniably a major pillar of this society, one so large it cannot possibly be toppled. As a result, the discovery of its cannibalistic activities serve as a final reminder of the pollution screen, showing that humanity is in such a dire situation that the consumption of human flesh is the only remaining means of survival.

In conclusion, *Soylent Green* also contains two terministic screens. First, there is the screen of degradation, referring to both large-scale, sociological collapse and a ceaseless wearing-down of the individual human spirit. The former is present in the film's world-building, with mass homeless and food shortages depicted as inescapable facts of everyday life. The latter is depicted in the actions and words of the individual characters, namely in Sol choosing to die rather than continue living a hellish existence. Second, there is the screen of pollution, referring to both literal environmental devastation and a poisoning of human systems of morality. The former is demonstrated in the film's visual elements, with the air a sickly shade of green and the natural world all but extinct. Combined, these two screens exude an ideology that serves as an environmentalist cautionary tale, warning the audience of the potentially catastrophic consequences of technology and industry on the Earth's biosphere, and thus on human civilization itself.

CHAPTER SIX:

CONCLUSION

By analyzing *Modern Times* and *Soylent Green* through a Burkean/Marxist lens, it is clear that both films utilize their respective visual styles and dialogue to construct terministic screens that exude Marxist themes of alienation and class struggle. I decided to analyze these particular films because of how they reflect interconnected themes from opposite angles, the former being a light-hearted comedy and the latter being a gritty science fiction noir. In this chapter, I offer my conclusions about this project, and will explicitly answers my research questions: 1) *What terministic screens can be identified in the dystopian worlds of* Modern Times *and* Soylent Green*?* & 2) *In what ways is a Marxist ideology reflected in each film?* After reviewing my findings from each film, I examine the relevance of the films' dystopian themes in contemporary society, and also explore why themes of environmentalism and societal oppression have remained popular over numerous decades. Finally, I examine the limitations of this project and offer suggestions for future research endeavors.

Major Findings/Research Questions

As demonstrated in Chapter Four, the film *Modern Times* contains the terministic screens of dehumanization and the American Dream. To reiterate, the former refers to the systemic process through which humanity is devalued, both in terms of physical well-being and human emotion. Through the dehumanization screen, *Modern Times* exudes Marxist themes of alienation. The working class, as exemplified by the male and female co-leads, are either working or tirelessly seeking employment and receiving little to no reward for their labors. The film reinforces this screen through imagery of overbearing

authority figures who maintain power through technology, with a Big Brother-like Boss keeping his employees under constant surveillance and a feeding machine that causes workers great pain all in the name of a more efficient workday (Chaplin, 1936). The film uses this screen to problematize industrialization, showing technology not as means through which to achieve prosperity but rather a means of oppression.

In the context of this project, the phrase "American Dream" refers to both the idealized image of a middle-class, suburban family and to the broader idea of a life free of material want and hardship. *Modern Times* displays this terministic screen through imagery that invokes Marxian class struggle. The ruling class, such as the aforementioned boss, is shown to live comfortable lives free of manual labor, while the proletariat is confined to squalor. The classic "white picket fence" ideal is show as desirable but largely unattainable, as exemplified by the Tramp's fantasy about such a life being interrupted by a scolding from a police officer, a symbol of the harsh realities that bar many people from achieving an idealized lifestyle. Similarly, the scenes of the Tramp and his love interest inside the closed-down department store convey this unattainability, showing that these characters (and thus the working class in general) can only access such comforts by way of subverting the capitalist system rather than working within it. As a result, the film exudes a sentimental but unmistakably critical portrayal of American culture and economic policy, challenging the pillars of capitalism and industrialization simultaneously.

Likewise, Chapter Five shows that the film *Soylent Green* contains the screens of degradation and pollution. Again, the former refers to a systemic wearing down of humanity, both sociologically and in terms of the human spirit. On the sociological level,

the most obvious example of this in *Soylent Green* is the grinding poverty of this future world; with a privileged few living in comfort while the streets are full of shantytowns for the homeless. This degradation screen also manifests itself through subtler indicators. Among them is the existence of a socialized rationing system for distributing food and water to the masses that has replaced the American consumer culture. Such a radical shift from a free market to a planned economy, in a film produced during the Cold War no less, reinforces the dire consequences of unchecked industrial development. Of course, the most obvious sociological element of the degradation screen is the film's infamous twist ending, with the reveal that Earth's natural resources have been exhausted to the point where cannibalism is the only feasible solution, albeit without public knowledge of such tactics.

On the individual level, the screen of degradation is shown through people being reduced to both objectification and hopelessness. Young, attractive women prostitute themselves to the wealthy as "furniture," preferring life as a concubine to the harsh realities of poverty (Fleischer, 1973). The sick and elderly, especially those who remembered the unpolluted past, find life so miserable that death via assisted suicide is seen as a preferable alternative, one so appealing that it is referred to by the deceivingly innocent euphemism of "going home" (Fleischer, 1973). Combined, these thematic elements form a screen that condemns industrial society as ultimately self-destructive, destined to collapse under the weight of its own consumption and technological prowess.

Again, the screen of pollution refers to both environmental devastation and a corrupting influence on human society. In terms of the former, right from the opening montage, the film bombards the viewer with images of a world that has become

irreversibly poisoned. The air is constantly full of suffocating green smog, and real food is prohibitively expensive to all but the wealthiest of society. Plants and animals are virtually non-existent, to the point where nature footage is able to move both main characters to tears, devastated by the beauty that humanity destroyed for its own benefit. On the societal level, the screen of pollution points to the omnipresent Soylent Corporation as a corrupted totem of this world, an amoral conglomerate that is so woven into the fabric of society that its villainous actions must be tolerated, as to destroy it would lead to even greater starvation. In summary, this film presents the screen of pollution as an inescapable feature of an industrialized civilization, a feature that destroys not only the world's natural beauty but also human systems of morality.

Implications

The main benefit in studying these specific films is that they offer a glimpse of countercultural narratives that question major pillars of society. *Modern Times* problematizes the idea that industrialization, and the capitalist system that endorses it, leads to prosperity and abundance for all, showing the dark underbelly of poverty and inequality that such a system inherently requires. *Soylent Green* makes similar criticisms, but expands upon them by incorporating environmentalist themes, showing how runaway industrial and technological development can devastate the Earth and the quality of human life along with it. An understanding of mainstream rhetoric and popular culture is essential for an understanding of history and the mechanisms of human society, and thus understanding texts and artifacts that seek to counter the mainstream is equally vital.

Environmental themes are heavily present in *Soylent Green*, but are far from confined to one single film. According to Bohlmann (2013, Aug 27), the American

movie-going public is fascinated by films depicting the natural world, with said affinity dating as far back as silent safari films such as 1910's *Roosevelt in Africa*. In recent years, Bohlmann (2013, Aug 27) argues, this fascination has resulted in a "green wave" of filmmaking, with environmentally conscious blockbusters such as *Avatar, WALL-E,* and *Happy Feet* being released to critical and commercial success the world over (para. 4). Analyzing the environmental films of any decade can provide insight into eco-friendly mindsets, which can often take the form of the filmmakers attacking specific aspects of contemporary society, a subject that falls under the umbrella term of communication.

The theme of dystopia is present in both films, and is a theme that carries significant weight in terms of both fiction and real-world politics. According to Schmidt (2014, Nov 19), dystopian cinema has greatly risen in popularity in the 2010s, with most entries in the genre involving an "environmental apocalypse" and offering "no solutions and little consolation" (para. 2). The author argues that there are two likely explanations for this uptick; 1) a method of critiquing the harsh realities of the present day, and 2) the viewing of such films as an "apathy-causing narcotic" to distract from real-world issues (Schmidt, 2014, Nov 19, para. 16). The latter refers to film audiences' ever-increasing awareness of problems like climate change and the income gap, and the quest for catharsis no matter how ineffective or counterproductive it may be (Schmidt, 2014, Nov 19). Film has a significant sway over culture and social institutions, and studying the framing of themes and imagery on the silver screen allows beneficial insight into how cultural attitudes are shaped.

On a darker note, there has recently been an upsurge in comparisons between historical dystopian societies and our own. According to Isaac (2016, Dec 17), the

resurgence of far-right populist movements in the United States has renewed attention to Hannah Arendt's 1951 book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Since at least 2016, many have drawn comparisons between Arendt's theses regarding the rise of Nazism and Stalinism and the election of Donald Trump. Isaac (2016) in particular saw parallels between Trump's "Build the Wall" rhetoric and the "mob mentality" against perceived outsiders promoted by totalitarian rulers (para. 6). In addition, Isaac (2016, Dec 17) compared Trump's status as a political outsider to "anti-system movements" banking on the appeal of "novelty for it's own sake" (para. 8). Evidently, similar comparisons were also drawn by members of the general public, as in the weeks following Trump's inauguration *The Origins of Totalitarianism* rose to the "Top 10" of several bestseller lists (Williams, 2017). Dystopia is a both an established fact of history and a well-founded fear for the future, and our popular culture that is full of narratives and images that exemplify both of these elements, making Burke and Marx excellent tools for deciphering their inner machinations.

Limitations/Future Research

The most prominent of this project's limitations is the focus on only two exemplar texts. As thematically and ideologically rich as these two films are, that is still a small sample from which to draw conclusions. Future studies could add other, similarly themed films to analysis, such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and Douglas Trumbull's *Silent Running* (1972). Plenty of films carry themes similar to those of *Modern Times* and *Soylent Green*, and because no two films convey a message in exactly the same way, an analysis with a larger sample size could extrapolate even more interesting information. In addition, both of these films are from multiple decades in the past, and in spite of their

relative timelessness, they do not reflect anti-establishment messages espoused by more recent films. A future study could incorporate more contemporary artifacts, such as Andrew Stanton's *WALL-E* (2008) and Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), which reflect not only modern attitudes but also how the mindsets presented in past films have evolved in the intervening decades. In addition, future research could examine films that are produced explicitly as political tools, such as documentary films like *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Outfoxed*.

Final Thoughts

To conclude this project, I return once again to my research questions. First, *What terministic screens can be identified in the dystopian worlds of* Modern Times *and* Soylent Green*?* The former film exemplifies the terministic screens of dehumanization and the American Dream, depicting industrial civilization as sustaining itself on radical inequality and human suffering, with workers tirelessly operating the dangerous machinery that drives the economy while the wealthy live a privileged, leisurely existence. The latter film exemplifies the terministic screens of degradation and pollution, showing an America reduced to crippling poverty due to overpopulation and environmental devastation, where the standard of living, food supplies and even basic ideas of morality have been eroded to the point of negligibility. Second, *In what ways is a Marxist ideology reflected in each film? Modern Times* demonstrates a Marxist viewpoint through class struggle, with the main characters aspiring to a level of material comfort that they have little chance of ever attaining. *Soylent Green* exudes a similar perspective via human commodification, showing a world where people are treated as burdens on society, waste products and finally literal consumer goods. Dystopian fiction often serves

as a vehicle for sociopolitical commentary, and both *Modern Times* and *Soylent Green* are no exception. By understanding the imagined dystopias of the past, scholars achieve a better understanding of dystopian critiques of the modern era, as well as the real world conditions and events that influence them. As I have demonstrated, the extension of Burke's theories further into the world of visual mediums is an effective way of better understanding our visual-heavy culture. Burke himself expanded our understanding of rhetoric by freeing scholars from the confines of public address, and now his work can continue to help critics deconstruct the rhetoric of the media-driven world we now inhabit.

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